

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) An artificial intervertebral disc, comprising:

a first baseplate having a first baseplate aperture;

a second baseplate having a second baseplate aperture;

and

a bearing mechanism coupled to said first baseplate and said second baseplate, wherein said bearing mechanism comprises a semispherical bearing and a pair ~~or~~ of retaining caps connected to each other by compression locking posts; and

said semispherical bearing including a first bore having a first diameter and a second bore having a second diameter that is smaller than the first diameter, said first and second bores being aligned with one another;

said pair of retaining caps including a first retaining cap having a first post insertible into said first bore and a second retaining cap having a second post insertible into said second bore;

wherein said first baseplate and said second baseplate rotate relative to said bearing mechanism; and

wherein rotation of said first baseplate to at least one angular position relative to said bearing mechanism extends said bearing mechanism through said first baseplate aperture.

2. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 1, wherein rotation of said second baseplate to said at least one angular position relative to said bearing mechanism extends said bearing mechanism through said second baseplate aperture.

3. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 1, wherein said rotation has a range defined by at least one of the group consisting of a first distance between said

first baseplate and said bearing mechanism, a second distance between said second baseplate and said bearing mechanism, and one or more physical parameters of said bearing mechanism.

4. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 1, wherein said first baseplate aperture has a tapered edge, such that an outwardly facing surface of said tapered edge has a larger diameter than an inwardly facing surface of said tapered edge, thereby increasing an angle of rotation of said first baseplate relative to said bearing mechanism in which said bearing mechanism does not physically contact said tapered edge.

5. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 1, wherein at least one of said baseplates has an internal semispherical contour.

6. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 1, wherein at least one of said baseplates has an outwardly facing, domed, vertebral body contact surface.

7. (canceled)

8. (currently amended) An artificial intervertebral disc, comprising:

a bearing mechanism, wherein said bearing mechanism comprises a semispherical bearing and a pair of retaining caps connected to each other by ~~compression~~-locking posts;

said pair of retaining caps including a first retaining cap having a first locking post having a first diameter, said first locking post having an axial opening extending therethrough, and a second retaining cap having a second locking post having a second diameter that is smaller than the first diameter of said first locking post, said second

locking post being insertible into the axial opening of said first locking post;

a first baseplate coupled to said bearing mechanism and having a first baseplate aperture and a first internal bearing surface shaped to conform with a first contour of said bearing mechanism; and

a second baseplate coupled to said bearing mechanism and having a second baseplate aperture and a second internal bearing surface shaped to conform with a second contour of said bearing mechanism; wherein said first baseplate and said second baseplate rotate relative to said bearing mechanism; wherein said bearing mechanism is seatable in said first internal bearing surface and said second internal bearing surface; and wherein said rotation has a range defined by at least one of the group consisting of a first distance between said first baseplate and said bearing mechanism, a second distance between said second baseplate and said bearing mechanism, and one or more physical parameters of said bearing mechanism.

9. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 8, wherein rotation of said first baseplate to at least one angular position relative to said bearing mechanism extends said bearing mechanism through said first baseplate aperture.

10. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 8, wherein rotation of said second baseplate to at least one angular position relative to said bearing mechanism extends said bearing mechanism through said second baseplate aperture.

11. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 8, wherein said first baseplate aperture has a tapered edge, such that an outwardly facing surface of said tapered edge has a larger diameter than an inwardly facing surface of said

tapered edge, thereby increasing an angle of rotation of said first baseplate relative to said bearing mechanism in which said bearing mechanism does not physically contact said tapered edge.

12. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 8, wherein a portion of said bearing mechanism is semispherical, said first and second internal bearing surfaces are substantially identical, and said first and second internal bearing surfaces have a semispherical contour.

13. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 8, wherein at least one of said baseplates has an outwardly facing, domed, vertebral body contact surface.

14. (canceled)

15. (currently amended) An artificial intervertebral disc, comprising:

a first baseplate, having a first baseplate outwardly facing surface, a first baseplate inwardly facing surface, and a first baseplate aperture, said first baseplate inwardly facing surface having a first baseplate bearing surface along an inward perimeter of said first baseplate aperture;

a second baseplate, having a second baseplate outwardly facing surface, a second baseplate inwardly facing surface, and a second baseplate aperture, said second baseplate inwardly facing surface having a second baseplate bearing surface along an inward perimeter of said second baseplate aperture;

a bearing defining a spherical contour, said bearing having a bearing bore;

a first retaining cap having an axial bore and passing through said first baseplate aperture and into said bearing bore; and

a second retaining cap passing through said second baseplate aperture, said bearing bore, said first baseplate aperture, and into said axial bore in said first retaining cap;

wherein said first retaining cap is secured to said bearing bore and said second retaining cap, thereby securing said first baseplate and said second baseplate to said bearing;

wherein said bearing is seatable in said first baseplate bearing surface and said second baseplate bearing surface;

wherein said first baseplate and said second baseplate rotate relative to said bearing ~~mechanism~~, and wherein rotation of said first baseplate to at least one angular position relative to said bearing ~~mechanism~~—extends said bearing ~~mechanism~~—through said first baseplate aperture.

16. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 15, wherein said rotation of said first baseplate is limited by interference between said first retaining cap and said first baseplate aperture, and wherein said rotation of said second baseplate is limited by interference between said second retaining cap and said second baseplate aperture.

17. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 15, wherein said first retaining cap is compression lockable to said bearing and said second retaining cap.

18. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 15, wherein said first baseplate aperture has a tapered edge, such that an outwardly facing surface of said tapered edge has a larger diameter than an inwardly facing surface of said

tapered edge, thereby increasing an angle of rotation of said first baseplate relative to said bearing in which said first retaining cap does not physically contact said tapered edge.

19. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 15, wherein at least one of said first baseplate and said second baseplate has an internal semispherical contour.

20. (original) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 15, wherein at least one of said first baseplate and said second baseplate has an outwardly facing, domed, vertebral body contact surface.

21. (previously presented) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 15, wherein said first baseplate aperture extends from said first baseplate outwardly facing surface to said first baseplate inwardly facing surface.

22. (previously presented) The artificial intervertebral disc of claim 15, wherein said second baseplate aperture extends from said second baseplate outwardly facing surface to said first baseplate inwardly facing surface.